



Misc

DECISION NOTICE
USE OF HELICOPTER TO TRANSPORT MOUNTAIN GOATS
INTO SCAPEGOAT WILDERNESS
MFWP Region 2
January 14, 2002

PROPOSAL

The Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) is proposing to airlift with helicopter approximately 10 mountain goats to a winter range 1.5 miles within the Scapegoat Wilderness, north of Lincoln, MT. The purpose is to re-establish a viable population of mountain goats near Red Mountain and Sourdough Creek. The decision authority for the use of helicopters in the Scapegoat Wilderness is with the Helena National Forest Supervisor, Tom Clifford.

MONTANA ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT (MEPA) PROCESS

The Fish, Wildlife and Habitat Management Framework for the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex (1995) agreed upon by the United States Forest Service (USFS) and FWP, outlines the process for addressing a proposal to use motorized access to manage fish and wildlife within the Scapegoat Wilderness. That process requires that FWP prepare an environmental assessment (EA) pursuant to MEPA. This document was made available for public comment on December 1, 2001. Comments were accepted through December 31, 2001. FWP advertised the public comment period and availability of the environmental assessment by legal notices in the following newspapers--Missoulian, Helena Independent Record, Great Falls Tribune, Blackfoot Valley Dispatch. At least 87 individuals, government agencies, environmental groups, sportsman groups and other interested parties received copies of the EA. Forty-four individuals and organizations received email copies of the EA. Paper copies were initially mailed to 38 additional individuals and organizations. FWP mailed letters to another 186 individuals and organizations, briefly describing the project and the availability of the EA. In response, paper copies were mailed to an additional 5 individuals and organizations requesting them. The EA was posted on the FWP website for review by an unknown number of people. Formal presentations of the project were made at two meetings at which the EA was also distributed. On December 12 FWP attended a meeting with the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex Management Team near Dupuyer, and on December 13 with the Professional Wilderness Outfitter Association in Choteau.

SUMMARY OF COMMENTS

A total of 9 written comments was received from the public. Eight comments supported the proposal. Supporting comments emphasized the importance of re-establishing mountain goats, as part of the wilderness landscape, and the limited nature of helicopter use in accomplishing the transplant. One letter opposed the proposal on basis that predation might nullify the success of the transplant. One verbal comment also mentioned predation. No comments suggested substantial negative impacts to the Scapegoat Wilderness. Three comments indicated that wilderness values might be enhanced by a successful transplant. One comment agreed with the environmental assessment process for making a final decision. The Montana Historical Society noted that operations would not negatively impact cultural sites. One commentator offered suggestions for handling captured goats. One commentator raised questions about Gallatin National Forest involvement with the capture operations and that private landowners in the capture area should be contacted. One commentator suggested means of improving helicopter safety.

The scope of the EA was to address only the use of helicopters within the Wilderness, as required by the Wilderness Act and USFS Regulations and the above-mentioned agreement between the USFS and FWP. Therefore, predation, which may play a role in the natural ecological process in the Scapegoat Wilderness,

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was not an issue within the scope of the EA. Also, capture operations that may require helicopter assistance outside the wilderness were outside the scope of this EA.

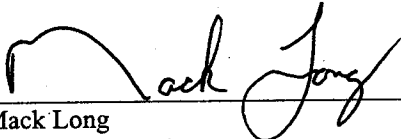
DECISION

Utilizing the environmental assessment and public comment, a decision must be made which addresses concerns and issues identified in the review process.

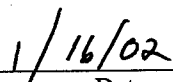
In light of the public comments and internal agency review, with amendments I accept the draft environmental assessment as final. Internal review by both FWP and USFS resulted in minor amendments to the Draft EA and maybe found in the Final EA on page 5 (10c), page 6 (2a,b,c), page 10 (6b), and page 15 (13f).

It should also be noted that FWP is preparing a plan of operations for the capture of mountain goats to be submitted to the Big Timber Ranger District, Gallatin National Forest. FWP, as is its policy, will contact landowners near the capture site prior to any operations. The FWP Wildlife Research Laboratory in Bozeman has been asked to help to prepare a protocol for handling of captured goats. Helicopter safety issues are covered by FWP and USFS protocols and will be followed, but additional on-site recommendations by pilots and FWP and USFS personnel will be considered.

After review of this proposal and the corresponding public support, it is my recommendation to use a helicopter to airlift approximately 10 mountain goats to the Red Mountain area inside the Scapegoat Wilderness, subject to approval by the Helena National Forest Supervisor and the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission.



Mack Long
Regional Supervisor



Date

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After review of this proposal and the corresponding public support, it is my recommendation to use a helicopter to airlift approximately 10 mountain goats to the Red Mountain area inside the Scapegoat Wilderness, subject to approval by the Helena National Forest Supervisor and the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission.

Mack Long
Regional Supervisor

Date